



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Mariana Fruit Bat Now Protected Throughout Mariana Archipelago

The Mariana fruit bat – a medium-sized bat found only in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) - has been reclassified from endangered to threatened status on Guam and newly listed as threatened in the CNMI, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

Known as “fanihi” in the Chamorro language, the Mariana fruit bat was originally listed as endangered on Guam only, in the belief that bats on Guam formed a distinct and separate population from those in CNMI. Recent studies indicate the bats move from one island to another, linking these colonies as a single population. Because of the larger size of the total population, the species is being reclassified.

“We believe that listing this species as threatened throughout its range will retain an appropriate level of protection throughout the Mariana Islands,” said David B. Allen, Director of the Service’s Pacific Region. “Our ultimate goal is to recover the species throughout the archipelago, so that future generations will still be able to see and enjoy this important part of the islands’ culture.”

Currently, fewer than 100 individual Mariana fruit bats remain on Guam and a fluctuating population of 1,100 remains on Rota. In the northern islands (all islands north of Farallon de Medinilla) fewer than 5,000 individuals remain. On Saipan and Tinian, few individuals are known to inhabit or visit these islands.

Native forests are the primary habitat required by the fruit bat, although some introduced plant species can provide roost sites and sources of food. Important components of tropical forest systems, fruit bats disperse seeds, which helps maintain forest diversity and contributes to plant regeneration. The fruit bat feeds on a wide variety of plant material but primarily eats breadfruit, papaya, and figs.

Habitat loss and degradation pose a major threat to the bat. The southern islands of the archipelago have lost significant habitat due to land conversion for agriculture, military, commercial, and residential development. In the northern islands, feral pigs, goats, and cattle have destroyed or severely damaged the native forest habitat.

The Mariana fruit bat faces additional threats such as illegal hunting, predation by introduced predators such as brown tree-snakes, rats, and feral cats; vandalism; natural disasters or random environmental events such as typhoons, volcanic eruptions, and fire; and hunting in violation of territorial laws.

Strong fliers that traverse long distances, the Mariana fruit bat can easily fly between islands (ranging from 18 to 62 miles apart). Evidence indicates that bats from Rota visit Guam for several months at a time.

The Mariana fruit bat is a member of the family Pteropodidae, which is often referred to as flying foxes because of the canine appearance of the face. The bats range in weight from 0.66 pounds to 1.15 pounds (males are slightly larger than females) and have an impressive wingspan ranging from 2.75 to 3.5 feet. All animals have grizzled black to brown fur and a golden brown mantle. The head color varies from brown to dark brown.

Mariana fruit bats live in colonies ranging from a few individuals to more than 800 and group themselves into harems (1 male with 2-15 females) or bachelor groups consisting primarily of males. The bat colonies sleep during much of the day, but they perform many other activities as well such as grooming, breeding, scent-rubbing, marking, flying, climbing to other roost spots, and defending roosting territories (harem males only). Bats gradually depart colonies for several hours after sunset to forage.

The species is believed to reproduce year-round with the female generally producing one offspring a year. This low reproductive rate, for a mammal of this size, results in a low population growth and thus a slow rate of recovery when the population numbers are greatly reduced.

In the CNMI, the Mariana fruit bat occurs primarily on private and Commonwealth lands, including inhabited and uninhabited islands. On Guam, it is known to roost primarily on federal lands (Andersen Air Force Base and the Ritidian Unit of the Guam National Wildlife Refuge) and forage widely throughout the island.

The proposed rule for listing the species was published March 26, 1998. Since then, there have been three public comment periods opened on March 26, 1998, May 29, 1998, and May 27, 2004.

Under a settlement agreement approved by the United States District Court for the District of Hawaii on August 21, 2002, the Service is required to make a final decision on the proposal to reclassify the Mariana fruit bat from endangered to threatened on Guam and list the Mariana fruit bat as threatened in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands by December 31, 2004.

Copies of the final rule may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://pacificislands.fws.gov>. Copies are also available by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service office in Honolulu at 808 792 9400.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.